



THE BORDERLAND OF RIGHT AND WRONG



AN ESSAY ON THE ADIAPHORA

BASED ON ARTICLE X OF THE FORMULA OF CONCORD
AND DELIVERED AT THE TEXAS DISTRICT CONVENTION
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by

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Adiaphora.

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The Tenth Article of the Formula of Concord grew out of the Adiaphoristic Controversy, which had disturbed the Lutheran Church soon after Luther's death. Emperor Charles V had gained a military victory over the Protestants and had forced upon the Lutherans the so-called Augsburg Interim. An interim is a temporary agreement in religious matters. In this case the Lutherans were permitted to retain their doctrinal position, but were compelled to acknowledge the authority of the Pope and bishops and to celebrate the Sacraments according to Roman ritual. Melancthon and other leaders in the Leipzig Interim weakly accepted this compromise, since, they said, according to the *Augsburg Confession*, ceremonies are matters of indifference. They are neither commanded nor prohibited in the Bible; hence Christians have freedom to use or not to use them as they deem best. The opposition was led by a young Wittenberg professor, only twenty-eight years of age, Matthias Flacius, who was supported by Amsdorf, Brenz, Corvinus, and others. Their attitude was: "Nothing is an adiaphoron when confession and offense are involved." Due to a happy political change the Lutherans again received religious liberty, but the controversy went on. Together with other quarrels that were rending the Church the differences regarding adiaphora were settled in the *Formula of Concord*, and settled in the sense of Flacius. In outline this Tenth Article may be summarized thus:—

1. *The Controversy*.—Some say: In *adiaphoris* (middle things) we may make concessions to the opponents, even if we do not agree in doctrinal matters. Others say: We cannot and must not do so.

2. *Statement of the Lutheran Doctrine*.—1) We must not classify as adiaphora those things that are against the Word of God (§ 5) nor those ceremonies that would merely produce the appearance of unity (§ 5 b) nor those that do not contribute to good order, etc., in the Church (§ 7). 2) Real adiaphora are not worship in themselves and must be distinguished from it (§ 8).

3. *Decision of the Controversy*.—1) Every church has the right and power to change adiaphora in the interest of good order (§ 9). 2) But in times of persecution nothing can be conceded, even in customs, on account of the confession of truth and the conscience of the weak (§§ 10—18).

This is the position of Luther in the Smalcald Articles (§§ 19—23) and otherwise (§ 24). Antitheses (§§ 25—31).

In addition to matters related to the forms of religious worship there is a great number of issues in the life of the congregation and of the individual that call for discussion under the aspect of *things indifferent* (adiaphora). Our article is headed "Of Church Rites," and it treats mainly of ceremonies. But it quotes Scripture-texts that have a much wider implication, and in the Thorough Declaration it distinctly says that "the article concerning *Christian liberties* is here at stake, which the Holy Ghost through the mouth of the holy apostle so earnestly charged his Church to preserve" (p. 1057). Ceremonies are the subject, but under the aspect of the great principle of Christian freedom; and the purpose of the article is that every one might understand "what every Christian congregation and every

Christian man, and, most of all, preachers, are to do or to leave undone, without injury to conscience, *with respect to adiaphora*, in order that God may not be angered, love may not be injured, the enemies of God's Word be not strengthened, nor the weak in faith offended" (p. 1061).

I. Ceremonies.

In our day neither Rome nor the State demands of us Lutherans that we in any way modify our doctrines or practises. Yet the matter of adiaphora is not for that reason a dead issue in the Church. The question is still one that is of practical value. We cannot ignore the fact that in congregational and church-life the question of ceremonies, the order and forms of worship, have, even within very recent years, again become a matter of discussion. Which order of service shall we follow in our congregations? How shall the minister be vested? Shall we have crucifixes, the sign of the cross, chanting at the altar? Shall we have vested choirs? Shall we celebrate saints' days? These and related questions have become living issues in our Synod through a trend towards ritualism found in ours as in most Protestant churches.

Which of these forms of worship are matters of indifference? Which shall be introduced and which excluded? If we exclude them, then on what grounds? To what extent is Christian fellowship affected? Is it possible that also among outward forms there are to-day such as involve confession?

Regarding all externals of church-life we say that they are indifferent inasmuch as —

- 1) The congregation may, according to its best judgment, agree on certain forms of worship and organization (order of service; relation of congregational officers to one another; etc.).

- 2) They are to be ordered in such a manner as to serve the promulgation of the Gospel, 1 Cor. 14, 26. The welfare of the congregation should be considered as above that of the individual.

- 3) A congregation may in proper order make changes in the arrangements of worship, the conduct of its business, the language, etc.

Uniformity in externals, while an adiaphoron, is nevertheless not a matter of slight importance. The Lutheran Church is a liturgical Church, and the essence of liturgy is uniformity. Since the English work has become prominent, a deplorable lack of uniformity has developed in the order of our services. Liberty is good, but anarchy is an extreme, which hampers the work of the Church. As it is, by the liberties which our congregations take with the official order of service there has been created a state of liturgical anarchy which is contrary to the spirit of the Reformation and the principles of Luther and his coworkers.

Ceremonies may indeed become a matter of conscience. So it was in the sixteenth century when forms of worship distinctive of the Catholic Church were forced upon the Protestants by the interims. It was here that Melanchthon grew weak, not recognizing the offense to Christian consciences caused by the reintroduction, for instance, of fasting on Fridays and of celebrating the Corpus Christi Festival. Certainly there is no wrong in refraining from the eating of meat on Friday or any other day, and there is no wrong in carrying about

the consecrated elements of the Lord's Supper in procession. But these ceremonies were inseparable from the Roman doctrine. They had been abolished in the Lutheran Church as legalistic and idolatrous. To resist their restoration was a matter of conscience, and Article X stresses this point.

It should be noted, however, that the case must be a very clear one before the question of "offense" or "conscience" is urged in adiaphora. In our Synod there is a revival of interest in liturgy. Conferences are held in various cities to discuss the history of Lutheran worship and the restoration of certain liturgical forms that were still in use in the days of the Reformation, but later were discontinued (colorful vestments, processions, carrying a cross, and using incense; also the ancient Gregorian chant and the observance of the canonical hours). In the discussion of this movement we cannot overlook the danger that with the elaboration of the liturgical part of worship there may be a slipping of a cog or two in the doctrines of the ministry, ordination, the Lord's Supper, and the relation of the Sacrament to the office of preaching. Yet the mere danger of going wrong doctrinally cannot be urged as a reason for opposing the liturgical movement nor for placing under suspicion those interested in it. From earliest days our pastors had to meet the false impression that we are "something like the Catholics." The crosses on our church steeples, the saints' names borne by many of our churches, the high altars with candles, the ministerial gown, the "bands," the chanting at the altar—all these relics of the Middle Ages were as much an "offense" to the average American fifty years ago as a more elaborate service would be to-day, when even Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists are building churches in the medieval style and have introduced high altars, candles, processions, vestments, liturgical colors, the chanting of psalms, etc. Naturally, no pastor or congregation will introduce the surplice and stole, chant the Scripture-lessons and the Creed, bow to the altar, etc., unless there is agreement in the congregation that such forms shall be used. Also, the individual congregation will not likely return to an elaborate service if doing so will unduly shock the neighboring congregations. But if we are going to be true to our Lutheran confession of freedom in adiaphora, we are going to permit every congregation finally to settle such matters according to its own best judgment and not plead our being offended as a reason against the use of such Christian liberty by our brethren. The writer subscribes to the discussion of this subject by Dr. Fuerbringer in the *Concordia Theological Monthly*. But in the end we shall be true to our Lutheran principles only if we permit the congregations and their pastors to order such matters according to best judgment. The variety of forms which may result cannot be any more offensive than the variety which has existed in the past thirty years in our English work.

II. Making a Sin of Indifferent Things.

Both the Greek Catholic and the Roman Catholic churches make the ceremonies of the Church, her liturgy and ritual, a matter as binding as the Moral Law. (*Council of Trent*, Sess. 22, chap. 5; Sess. 7, can. 13.) But the same burden is laid upon Christians also by Reformed legalism. The distinction between the Reformed and the Lutheran principle is this: We say: All that is not forbidden

in the Bible is a matter of Christian liberty; they say: All that is not commanded in the Bible is forbidden.

From this point of view we understand why some Calvinistic sects to the present day do not permit instrumental music in the church. Notice how a sectarian writer (in the *Montgomery* [Ala.] *Advertiser*, Dec. 27, 1925) demonstrates the sinfulness of organ music: "Christ is the Head of the Church and has all authority in heaven and earth. He commanded His disciples to teach them to observe all things whatsoever He commanded them, Matt. 28, 19, 20. They taught what Christ commanded; they never taught the use of instruments of music in the worship. Therefore Christ never taught them to teach or to use instruments of music in the worship. John said, 2 John 9, 10: 'Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ hath not God.' Christ never taught the use of instruments of music in His worship; those who use them go onward and abide not in the teaching of Christ; therefore those who use instruments in the worship have not God. . . . Again Paul says, Rom. 10, 17: 'Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.' 'Whatsoever is not of faith is sin,' Rom. 14, 23. Instruments of music in connection with the worship does not come of hearing, cannot be of faith. Therefore the practise is sinful."

It is a denial of Christian liberty when the Dunkers insist upon celebrating the Lord's Supper in the evening and make fellowship depend on love-feasts, foot-washing, and the kiss of charity. No less than twenty-nine sects practise foot-washing as a rite demanded by the Gospel. Among the River Brethren there are two sects which differ only in this, that, when this ceremony is observed, one sect demands that the same person should wash and dry the feet while the other lets one person wash and another person dry; but—they make fellowship hinge on this distinction. The Plymouth Brethren insist that Communion be celebrated in private homes, Acts 2, 46! Other sects, misinterpreting the apostle's direction, demand that women cover their head with a veil or bonnet whenever they attend worship.

The *Sunday-school Times* (March 30, 1912) contained an article on Sabbath-keeping and travel which well illustrates the workings of a conscience misinstructed on the subject of adiaphora. An Ontario reader questioned the use of trolley-cars by ministers on Sunday in exchanging pulpits: "I should like to know why the ministry think it no harm to travel from place to place on the Sabbath-day. I find it hard to believe that they think it right; yet they change off morning or evening service by trolley-car, thus 'offending the weak brother.' I am in a position to know the temptation of twentieth-century conveniences, as an electric car runs directly between my country home and my church in town, a distance of two miles; yet I walk this distance twice on Sabbath, to morning service and Sabbath-school. If there is any reason why a change of ministers, morning, evening, or between services, on the Sabbath-day will do more for promoting God's kingdom among men, I should be grateful to be enlightened." Another reader asks: "Is Sunday travel necessary? If not, this pastor is not consistent in denouncing employment of labor in stores that are open on Sunday, etc. If necessary, so is other employment necessary for various reasons." The editor gave this advice: "Give up Sunday travel on trolleys, trains, and all other similar means of conveyance except in cases of the utmost emer-

gency. Observe a Sabbath twenty-four hours long, without break of any sort. . . . The real question would seem to be whether the disciples of Christ can afford to patronize and thus far approve and encourage a Sabbath-breaking, godless traffic by their use of it on the Sabbath in Christ's service. Would not the possible loss to the Kingdom be far outweighed by gain to the Kingdom if every Christian layman and minister henceforth should entirely refrain from public-conveyance Sabbath-day travel except for the most extraordinary emergencies?" The same paper in its issue of July 23, 1910, prints the letter of a reader who has a small share in a wholesale grocery. "The firm is strictly temperate regarding liquor, but handles tobacco, which, they say, 'all wholesale groceries do.' Is it wrong for me to have my money thus invested?" The editor says the writer must sell his share in that company.

One sectarian has submitted a list of 38 reasons why no one should use tobacco. I quote a few: "1. It causes death. 3. It unfits for intellectual labor. 5. It injures morally. 6. It is a great social evil. 12. It is the first step in intemperance and leads to other vices. 14. It leads to bad company. 16. It is unmanly. 17. It is unholy. 28. It grieves your dearest friends and is displeasing to God. 29. It can be classed with intoxicating drinks as being a disgrace to a Christian nation. 33. You do not want to indulge in a habit that would be out of place in heaven. 37. You should not soil your mouth with what the lower animals refuse." The question arises whether the use of such methods of "reasoning" and preaching is not a hundred times worse than the use of tobacco, provided it be granted at all that the use of the "weed" is really bad.

In this connection the famous controversy in which Rev. C. H. Spurgeon was involved comes to mind. Spurgeon, in 1874, became the center of a controversy on tobacco-smoking. Dr. George F. Pentecost, who had been a guest at Mr. Spurgeon's home and had expressed in glowing terms his admiration of the preacher and his work, on his return from his continental tour again visited the Tabernacle. Mr. Spurgeon asked him to divide the sermon with him, one taking the doctrine and the other the enforcing and illustration of it. All unwittingly, as Dr. Pentecost afterwards declared, he spoke of his struggles in renouncing his cigar, and Mr. Spurgeon afterwards felt that he could not allow the matter to go by default. So he arose and declared that he hoped that very evening to smoke a cigar to the glory of God. The utterance was very widely discussed. Many were grieved; many applauded; before long Spurgeon's photograph appeared on tobacco packets. In a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* he gave his view of the situation, the irony of which is not lessened by the fact that Dr. Pentecost afterwards himself became a smoker. Mr. Spurgeon wrote:—

"I demur altogether and most positively to the statement that to smoke tobacco is in itself a sin. It may become so, as any other indifferent action may, but as an action it is no sin. Together with hundreds of thousands of my fellow-Christians I have smoked, and, with them, I am under the condemnation of living in habitual sin if certain accusers are to be believed. As I would not knowingly live in the smallest violation of the Law of God and sin is the transgression of the Law, I will not own to sin when I am not conscious of it. There is growing up in society a pharisaic system which adds to the commands of God the precepts of men; to that system I will

not yield for an hour. The preservation of my liberty may bring upon me the upbraidings of many good men and the sneers of the self-righteous; but I shall endure both with serenity so long as I feel clear in my conscience before God. The expression 'smoking to the glory of God' standing alone has an ill sound, and I do not justify it; but in the sense in which I employed it I will stand to it. No Christian should do anything in which he cannot glorify God, and this may be done, according to Scripture, in eating and drinking and the common actions of life. When I have found intense pain relieved, a weary brain soothed, and calm, refreshing sleep obtained by a cigar, I have felt grateful to God and have blessed His name; this is what I meant, and by no means did I use sacred words triflingly. If through smoking I had wasted an hour of my time; if I had rendered my mind less vigorous, I trust I should see my fault and turn from it; but he who charges me with these things shall have no answer but my forgiveness. I am told that my open avowal will lessen my influence, and my reply is that, if I have gained any influence through being thought different from what I am, I have no wish to retain it. I will do nothing upon the sly and nothing about which I have a doubt."

III. The Problem of the Weak Brother.

Weak Christians are often referred to in the New Testament Scriptures. Rom. 14, 1, 2: "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things; another, who is weak, eateth herbs." 15, 1: "We, then, that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves." 1 Cor. 8, 9, 11: "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak. . . . And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died?" 9, 22: "To the weak became I as weak that I might gain the weak. I am made all things to all men that I might by all means save some." 11, 30: "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." 1 Thess. 5, 14: "Now, we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men."

Christians are called strong or weak with reference to indifferent things according to the effect which the use of such things has upon their conscience. One who has no scruples and does not fear to offend God by employing or enjoying these things the Bible calls a strong Christian. One whose conscience troubles him because of such indulgence it calls a weak Christian. Our theologians distinguish between the "erring" conscience and the "doubting" conscience. The *erring* conscience is quite sure that certain things left to Christian liberty are not to be so regarded, but must be considered sinful, as when a Catholic fails to make the sign of the cross when entering his church or fails to confess his sins to the priest or when the sectarian indulges in the use of liquor or tobacco in any form. The *doubting* conscience, on the other hand, is one that is uncertain, that is unable to answer the question, Is this right, is that wrong? A Christian knows that certain occupations or forms of entertainment are opposed by his Church. He does not agree with the arguments against such amusements or vocations; yet the public testimony of his pastor, of the synodical papers, etc., causes him to doubt his own certainty with regard to these same matters. Or, on the other hand, certain things are deemed permissible by his associates

(whom he considers good Christians), but in his own mind he has the most serious misgivings. Such a conscience we call a doubting one. Now, it is a clear doctrine of Scripture that whatever a man's conscience regards as wrong is wrong to him, Rom. 14, 14, 20. And to act in defiance of the doubts which arise in his mind about the moral value of certain things is to sin against the First Commandment, inasmuch as he does things at the risk (so he believes) of offending God. In any case, then, things themselves indifferent which one regards as wrong — though conscience may be improperly instructed on this point or regarding which he has no certainty whether they are permissible or not — thereby are no longer *to such a person* a true adiaphoron, but become definitely sinful if indulged in contrary to the warning voice of conscience.

In the Letter to the Romans and in First Corinthians (Rom. 14, 13, 15, 21; 1 Cor. 8, 13) drinking wine and eating flesh are acknowledged by the apostle as adiaphora. Paul refers to himself as one who had no scruples about these things. But he insists that the total abstainer and vegetarian (for conscience' sake) should not be despised. Better-informed Christians finding themselves at table with him ought not to eat meat if he, through moral cowardice, might be led to do the same to the hurt of his conscience; nor again, if their meat-eating would cause him grief; nor, again, if it might lead him to withdraw from their fellowship. The Christian strong in the faith, who well knows the indifference of meats and drinks, — "all things indeed are clean," — of times and seasons, should abate of his liberty or under circumstances even sacrifice it out of charity to his weak brother.

But still it remains that this overscrupulousness is a weakness, a fault. The Church must tolerate it, must even treat it tenderly; but encourage it the Church must not. It has also, and even more, to cherish and vindicate the glorious liberty of the children of God. The weak in the faith who scruple over meats and drinks, and times and seasons, are not to be allowed to obstruct the Gospel; not to be allowed to pervert others to their ignorance and error; not to be allowed to set up their defective, yes, their false, gospel as a rival to the perfect law, the law of liberty, which whoso looketh into shall be blessed in his doing, Jas. 1, 25. The Church can tolerate a private practise or, for a time, a private belief that is defective; but it cannot tolerate a rival gospel. To do so would be, not charity, but unfaithfulness. The Christian weak in the faith is not to be regarded as a schismatic so long as his error does not vitiate his life, and so long as he is content to hold his error in a private, individual, modest fashion. But as soon as he erects it into an aggressive, proselyting, intolerant faction, or heresy, he is to be given place to, in the way of subjection, "no, not for an hour," Gal. 2, 5; then the Church must cry aloud and spare not. Then these weak brethren are become false brethren, who spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus that they may bring us into bondage, Gal. 2, 4. A weak brother is tolerable, but a weak Church never! Indeed, it is the duty of the Church to work upon the weak, so that Christian liberty be acknowledged by the largest possible number.

But how about Paul's principle: "If meat causeth my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh forevermore that I cause not my brother to stumble," 1 Cor. 8, 13? Must we moderate meat-eaters, then, turn vegetarians? Must we abstain from all alcoholic beverages because some might be led into intemperance? What of Paul's own practise?

He did not become a vegetarian; and when Timothy had a weak stomach, he advised him to drink wine. There is no lawful indulgence which could not be prohibited if we accepted this verse as a principle as universal and all-inclusive as the law of love. Take the matter of jewelry. It is not a necessity; it is a luxury. On the one hand, it ministers a legitimate satisfaction. On the other, its lure is so powerful that, quite possibly, it does, on the whole, more harm than good. Jewelry has lured many a girl and woman to her fall, is doing it to-day, and will do it. If merchants in this line told all they knew on this subject, the public would be shocked. It is also true that every time a woman decks herself in jewels, it may cause some weak sister to offend. It is certain to do so sometimes. It is certain that, if the wearing of jewelry were given up entirely, these weak sisters would not offend—certainly not in this way. Moreover, the very apostle that is quoted against wine has used much stronger language against jewelry. Is it not, then, our duty to wear no jewels while the world standeth? The good sense of Christendom repudiates the suggestion as an absurd extreme. It is our duty not to put temptation in the way of the weak; but it is also the duty of the weak to keep out of the way of temptation. Automobiles cause many a weak brother to offend. Men have stolen to buy an automobile or to maintain it. Others have left creditors unpaid. Moreover, most automobilists are lawbreakers in the matter of speed, who, were there no automobiles, would be law-abiding citizens. This lawlessness sometimes results in injury, sometimes in death, to themselves and those with them or to others using the highways on their lawful occasions, not to speak of the property loss. The toll of injury, loss, and death from automobiles is a scandal. Does St. Paul, then, require the strong brother, who can use his liberty without abusing it, to forego or discard his car because of the weak brother? Must he and his family forego the beauty of the country, the fresh air, the zest of appetite, the general exhilaration of these "spins," because one weak brother may be made covetous, another extravagant, another reckless, heedless of danger to life and limb, misusing his liberty? Neither St. Paul nor the Church nor the good sense of men would say so.

Paul's meaning is that, if I have knowledge of some weak brother who may go wrong because I indulge myself, I ought to forego the indulgence. I am obliged to this self-sacrifice, however, not by a vague danger, but by a pretty definite knowledge. If a man unable to control his appetite for drink were among my dinner guests, I ought not to serve drink. I ought to omit either the man or the drink. But not both. It is unreasonable to demand that I exclude drink from my table simply because some weak brother who is not there may hear that wine was served and make it a pretext to go off on a spree. My conduct surely must not be governed by his bad logic. The principle is not: "A gets drunk; therefore B must not drink"; but: "A gets drunk; therefore A must not drink, and B must not drink when A is around." The declaration is conditional. If the apostle knows of definite cases in which his eating food will lead to others' being encouraged to violate the dictates of conscience, then certainly he will never eat meat so long as there is real danger. But if he knows of no such danger, he will use his Christian freedom and eat without scruple, 1 Cor. 10, 25—27. 29. He does not of course mean that the whole practise of Christians is to be regulated with

a view to the possible scrupulousness of the narrow-minded. That would be to sacrifice our divinely given liberty (2 Cor. 3, 17; Col. 2, 16, 17) to the ignorant prejudices of bigots. The circumstances of this or that Christian may be such that it is his duty to abstain from intoxicants, although he is never tempted to drink to excess; but Christians in general are bound by no such rule, and it would be tyranny to try to impose such a rule.

When must we, then, cease to have any regard for the weak in the ordering of our church affairs? Answer: When the weak Christian demands our acknowledgment of his erroneous position in some point of doctrine or practise or at least demands an attitude of toleration which places his view upon equal footing with the teaching of Scripture. In other words, a weakness in Christian understanding or ethical conviction must not become a norm for our public teaching and practise. Dr. P. E. Kretzmann gives the following illustration: "It may happen that a Christian drifts into a lodge, that is, into a really antichristian society. When it develops that he has done this in ignorance, an attempt must be made to instruct him. He will not be immediately expelled from the congregation, but an effort will be made to convince him of his error. Quite likely it will be impossible to admit him to Communion while he is being instructed, as this would give offense in most of our congregations. But if such a man, while being dealt with by pastor and congregation, should endeavor to make propaganda for his error and for lodgery in general, he has become evident not as a weak, but as a wicked person, who rejects instruction. The same applies to one who is guilty of unionism or syncretism. So long as he is willing to be instructed, and so long as he accepts the Word of God and its admonitions, one may exercise patience if his sin is not a public one. But if such a person demands recognition for his false position and in spite of the warning of the divine Word frequents other churches and supports them, patience ceases to be a virtue, and other measures must be adopted." (*Concordia Theological Monthly*, 1934. Translation from the German approved by the author.)

The distinction that is to be made between those who err *doctrinally* through weakness of understanding and those who tenaciously cling to their error after they have acknowledged it as such, was brought out by Dr. C. F. W. Walther in *Lehre und Wehre*, 1868, as follows: "Are we, then, to excommunicate every one as a heretic who should err in some non-fundamental point? Must we at once sever fellowship with a Church that is contaminated with an error of this nature? As already stated, this is not our opinion. What we claim is this: While not to be treated as a heresy, an error in non-fundamentals, if it contradicts a clear word of God, is to be demonstrated as invalid, to be fought and opposed with all patience and instruction. If all means have been exhausted, so that it is clear that it is not a case of weak understanding or lack of comprehension; when also in the non-fundamental error it develops that the erring one consciously and persistently contradicts the Word of God and thereby wrecks the original basis of our faith, — such a one is living in mortal sin and is not to be tolerated as a brother in the faith. This applies to church denominations. An absolute unity of faith and teaching is not possible in this life, only a fundamental one. But this does not prevent us from attacking doctrines in non-fundamentals which are against the clear Word of God. Such a Church cannot be regarded

as a true Church if it professes officially such errors in non-fundamentals and stubbornly persists in the same in spite of instruction and thereby weakens the organic basis; or also if a Church persists in calling religiously indifferent some departure from the clear Word of God."

The definite views entertained by Dr. Walther regarding the taking of interest are well known. He regarded the ordinary lending of money on interest as a sin and charged the clergy with the duty of preaching against it. Yet, when a meeting of clergymen and laymen in Boston expressed its dissent from Dr. Walther's views on usury, he did not regard the bonds of fellowship as severed. (Pamphlet: "*Das Ausleihen des Geldes auf Interessen im Lichte des Gebotes der Naechstenliebe*. Eine freundliche Kritik der Aufsaetze im *Lutheraner* und *Lehre und Wehre* vom praktischen Standpunkte aus fuer die Pastoren und Laien der Synode von Missouri, Ohio u. a. St.") See also paper on usury prepared for the Minnesota and Dakota District meeting by Theo. Buenger, 1900, which quotes the Apology, XVI, 64; *Triglotta*, 332.) Indeed, Dr. Walther publicly declared this matter to be non-essential for fellowship and church union. A writer in an Iowa Synod paper had reproached him with inconsistency because he rejected the idea of open questions, yet refused to separate himself from those who took interest on their money. Walther replied (*Der Lutheraner*, May 1, 1871): "Let it be understood that we very well know how to distinguish between articles of the faith and such Scripture teachings as are not articles of the faith.¹⁾ A clear teaching of the Bible, whether it appears small or trifling, is never an 'open question.' But on the one hand we are willing to fight to the uttermost for every article of the faith, since our faith and our hope depend on each of them; and we deny fellowship to those who stubbornly contradict. On the other hand, we by no means regard it as necessary, in every case, to force the fighting to an extreme for other Scripture-teachings that are not articles of the faith. Much less shall we pronounce sentence of damnation upon the opposing error (although we reject it) or sever fellowship with those who only err in such matters. When a controversy concerns such doctrines as do not belong to the articles of the faith, we are only concerned with one thing: whether the opponents evidently contradict because they do not wish to subject themselves to the Scriptures; that is, whether they—in spite of their agreement with the fundamentals of Scripture—reject the foundation on which all these doctrines rest, namely, the Word of God." (Cf. also *Das Leihen auf Zinsen*, 1872, pp. 9. 15.)

Gerhard's position (*De Ecclesia*, 60, 4) has been that of our Church: "Those who on account of a difference in some outward form or on account of a discrepancy in some dogma that does not concern the foundation of salvation disagree with one another are not thereafter to be regarded as schismatics if only they remain united in the bond of faith and charity." And Calovius speaks of "differences in minor points of doctrine²⁾ while the unity of faith is retained and no article of faith is thereby subverted." Those who divide the Church for such reason he terms schismatics. (Baier, III, 636.)

1) That are concerned with matters of conduct rather than of belief.

2) Rules of conduct, he means. — G.

G.

IV. *Adiaphora* Imply the Right of Difference of Opinion.

There is no intention on the part of the essayist to urge in this connection the distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental articles of faith. This distinction only concerns the question, Which articles must be believed in order that one may be saved? Most of our dogmaticians regard the Lord's Supper as a non-fundamental article of faith. Yet they would certainly not acknowledge as a brother one who denied the real presence.

Again, the essayist has no intention of yielding his convictions in the matter of Open Questions. He holds that our Synod is right in denying that there is in theology room for such a category, *i. e.*, for doctrines clearly revealed regarding which Christians may disagree.

But on a great number of questions the Bible has said nothing at all. Scripture, *e. g.*, has said nothing about parochial lines in the geographical sense. Hence to lay a burden on any one's conscience by quoting our policy or common practise on this point is unevangelical. On the other hand, it would be separatistic to deny fellowship to those who do believe that geographical distance has a relation to congregational membership.

Scripture has no specific command that Christian day-schools must be established. We remember that some decades ago an attempt was made in Cincinnati to discipline members who refused to send their children to a parochial school. Our Synod is a unit in teaching that the maintenance of a Christian day-school is in our time and country a conscientious duty. We admonish people to send their children to such a school, and we quote Scripture to them. We believe that it is a neglect of duty not to make use of the Christian school. Yet we do not excommunicate those who, for some reason not involving a denial of the Scriptural principle, do not send their children to the parish-school. In stating this, I am not complaining of a weakness or inconsistency. Such practise is simply evangelical, and our schools are not perishing as the result of it.

The Bible says nothing about church fairs. It was not a church fair that Jesus broke up when he drove the money-changers from the Temple. Paul gives commands how to order a certain collection for the famine sufferers in Palestine. He does not give exclusive instructions. Those who would compel uniformity in this respect have no Scripture to back them up. In this as in other questions the distinction between essential and accidental has at times been ignored. We are not here trying to establish the permissibility of bazaars. We are merely quoting an instance of church practise upon which enlightened consciences may differ.

There is another category of questions already touched upon, of a simply doctrinal nature. The subject here to be argued is not whether any statement of Scripture may be accepted or rejected at will. Where the Bible speaks, no open questions can be pleaded. Difference even in points far removed from justifying faith may be divisive of church-fellowship. Any one who denies, *e. g.*, that Moses wrote the Book of the Law or that David fell into sin and repented simply contradicts the Word of God and thereby destroys the foundation of faith in all its teachings. Hence, too, when an unwillingness to accept the teachings of Scripture is evident, Christian unity is destroyed. But there is a danger that we accept *adiaphora* in

theory, but do not acknowledge them as such in practise. When the individual cases arise, the difference is accentuated to such a degree that the opposing parties make a doctrinal issue of a point of controversy which involves matters not pertaining to any doctrine or precept of Scripture. There is a tendency to labor continually with the argument from "*offense*" and thereby to make a thing that is in itself indifferent practically a sin. The attitude taken seems to be that a thing is indifferent in the sense that you cannot demand it of me as a condition of fellowship, but when the same thing is practised by another, he offends me and therefore commits a sin. Or we say that a thing "*becomes a matter of confession*" and thereby ceases to be an adiaphoron, — which may be perfectly true, but is sometimes urged so insistently that everything is made a doctrinal question by implication. Then there is the common habit of establishing a principle, for instance, separation of Church and State, but in the application of it forgetting all about the underlying texts of Scripture and calling things unscriptural and un-Lutheran because, in the opinion of the writer, it is against a certain "*principle*." Whether that principle really applies can of course only be established by proving that the Bible-text on which we have built it up also applies to the given case. But this is not done. What is demanded is a much closer study of the Scripture itself and the definite proof that something is against Scripture before we call it wrong.

V. The Changing Nature of Adiaphora.

It is necessary to observe that our opinion of indifferent things may change with change of time and place. In the days of the early Church it was not proper for women to attend church with uncovered heads (1 Cor. 11) because in that age decent women appeared in public with their heads covered. Some sects consider this rule of the apostle a command of perpetual force, whereas St. Paul simply establishes the general principle that decency and a proper regard of social form should prevail in the house of worship. Again, St. Paul prohibits the women from going about in bobbed hair, 1 Cor. 11, 4—16. Now, v. 14 says indeed that it is the natural thing for men to wear their hair short and for women to wear it long. But v. 16 the apostle expressly disclaims any purpose of making this a law. The ruling which he made must be understood in the light of popular sentiment of that age. To wear the hair short was generally understood to be a token of loose morals.

In the Old Testament we find passages which severely condemn the use of ornament and cosmetics by women, Is. 3, 16—26. But the meaning of these denunciations is clear when we note the argument of the New Testament, 1 Pet. 3, 4. Women are not to devote their best efforts to the ornamenting and beautifying of their persons, and for the sake of such things forget the inward hidden beauty which characterizes the Christian. No hard and fast rule regarding dress, ornaments, and cosmetics can therefore be made. From the days of Abraham to those of Paul Oriental women generally used cosmetics. The vessels containing these are found in great abundance wherever ancient cities are excavated. Neither the Old nor the New Testament prohibited the use of cosmetics. In Western lands there was a time, however, when the use of rouge was the unmistakable sign of a lewd woman. Even so certain modes of dress

were favored only by those of loose morals. In every age it is the business of the Church to watch over the dress and behavior of women to this extent, that they do not conform to that which is undeniably an appeal to voluptuousness. The great principles governing these habits are chastity and that temperate use of all visible things which keeps Christians from going to extremes.

Among the changing customs are those sometimes covered by the general treatment of etiquette, good manners, or good behavior. Unquestionably, as long as thirty years ago, a woman smoking cigarets attracted not the least attention in the Orient or even in some parts of Western Europe. The custom still shocked the sensibility of the visiting American. An undeniable change has taken place, and while on the one hand, due to the skilful advertising of cigaret-makers, this custom has abnormally spread among American women, it can no longer be said that it is the mark of a morally depraved person.

The policy of the Church must ever be to resist the adoption of any custom by our people that is offensive in the sense that it wipes out the distinction between the worldly-minded and the children of God. This principle is also to be kept in mind as we notice the change in drinking customs which we are witnessing — some bad, some indifferent — in this Repeal Age.

An illustration of the change from a thing morally doubtful to one morally indifferent is found in our judgment of life insurance. Our fathers warned against taking out life-insurance policies, and in some congregations this was a bar to membership. (Though it should be said that officially our Synod has never treated life insurance as a wrong for which members must be excommunicated. Also the well-known theses of Professor Bente in *Lehre und Wehre*, Volume 54, do not demand that our congregations proceed with church discipline against those who carry insurance.) But life insurance has changed. The policies of a generation ago generally partook of the form of a gamble. If the insured lived beyond a certain date, his policy expired, and all that he had paid in was lost. This was also the case when the insured lapsed in his payments. He — rather his heirs — could gain only if he kept up his payments or if he died before a certain term had expired. But in recent years a great many new forms of life insurance have been brought forward, and many of these do not, in the manner described, partake of the nature of a gamble with human life. The argument that "life insurance shows a lack of trust in God," while adduced by those who oppose life insurance, touches an *accidens* and not the essence of insurance. The same reasoning can apply to any form of investment and even to a bank account reserved for "a rainy day." We should admit that often, far too often, covetousness is at the bottom of such transactions, covetousness on the part of the beneficiary and even, by a strange freak of human nature, of the one insured, who cannot personally benefit from the policy. The desire in such cases is to benefit disproportionately from the moneys paid as premiums. But that covetous desire, too, is *accidens* and is not necessarily involved in taking out insurance. The man who keeps on reinvesting all his funds for greater gains by buying bonds, lands, etc., is in the same condemnation with him who limits his ability to give for the spread of the Gospel and relief of suffering by taking out life insurance in such amounts as will inevitably produce such a result. Yet in all these matters the rule applies that abuse does not make a rightful use sinful.

VI. Things Indifferent May Lose Their Indifferent Character.

This truth is brought out with eminent clearness in the fourteenth chapter of Paul's Letter to the Romans. He establishes the rule: "There is nothing unclean of itself." Such matters as eating, drinking, keeping certain holy days, are in themselves neither forbidden nor commanded; they are morally neutral, indifferent. Yet the apostle in the same chapter says that these indifferent things may in a given case lose their indifferent nature. Some circumstance may enter in which renders their use no longer optional, but prohibited. Of such matters we now intend to speak.

Things indifferent in themselves lose their indifferent character and become a matter of confession when they have become characteristic of doctrinal error and are so understood by others. Among the churchly ceremonies which belong into this group are the breaking of the bread in the Lord's Supper and the mode of immersion in baptism. This has long been recognized in our theology. But there are other points in connection with the Sacrament of the Lord's Table which are of practical interest to-day as illustrating the principle that things indifferent may acquire a confessional character. The choice of the common cup and of individual cups in Holy Communion is a matter of Christian liberty. But this does not mean that there should be freedom for each congregation to order this matter as it sees fit, without consulting other congregations. Our Article X says that at each particular time regard should be had to that which to the greatest extent promotes "good order, godly discipline, and the edification of the Church," that is, of the Church at large. However, to change from the common cup to the individual glasses is not a change of this kind. Neither "good order" nor "godly discipline" nor "the edification of the Church" requires or even advises it. Until a demand based on such reasons be recognized by the general agreement and official action of the Church, no individual pastor or congregation should yield to any sudden clamor for it and thus arbitrarily separate from the common and approved practise of the Church. A change, even though it be in regard to matters that are of themselves adiaphora, which completely antagonizes and revolutionizes a practise sanctioned not only by the usage of the Church in all ages, in all lands, and under all confessions, where the cup has not been denied the laity, but also by the example of the apostles and the institution of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, should not be contemplated by individual pastors and congregations except in consultation and agreement with the churches with which they are synodically united. The matter is not worthy the inevitable quarreling which will ensue when it is brought in the form of a resolution before a Missouri Synod congregation; we are not warned against the danger of contracting diseases in the Lord's Supper, but we are certainly warned against quarreling in our congregations.

Much the same reasoning holds good regarding the substitution of grape-juice for fermented wine. That the matter is one of Christian liberty need not be denied. Dr. Walther, in his *Pastorale*, page 168, says that not only as to bread, but also as to the wine the form of the elements is indifferent. ("Ein Adiaphoron ist es, ob das Brot gesaeuert oder ungesaeuert, ob es Roggen-, Weizen-, Korn-, Gersten- oder Haferbrot sei und ob es diese oder jene Gestalt habe,

wenn es nur ein Gebaeck aus Getreidemehl und Wasser ist. Ein Mittelding ist es ebenfalls, ob der Wein roter oder weisser, ganz reiner (merum) oder mit Wasser vermischter sei (dergleichen wahrscheinlicherweise der Herr nach landesueblicher Sitte gebraucht hat), wenn es nur Trank vom Gewaechs des Weinstocks ist, nach Matth. 26, 29.") Our theologians have never hesitated to answer with a no the other question, Would the use of leavened bread invalidate the Sacrament? By what line of reasoning are we compelled to deny the genuineness of the Sacrament because unfermented wine is used when we do not deny the validity when fermented bread is used? In an emergency, if no fermented wine would be obtainable, we could celebrate Communion with (genuine) grape-juice. But if the question is put, Shall we in our normal practise encourage the use of grape-juice for the use of wine? my answer would be an unhesitating no, for four reasons: a) It is wrong to depart from the established usage of the entire Christian Church through all the centuries. b) Grape-juice is not wine, and the use of it will raise in many people a doubt whether they are actually receiving the Sacrament, since to them the "fruit of the vine" has always meant, and means to-day, fermented wine. c) The use of grape-juice has been first advocated by Reformed sectarians, who condemn the use of all alcoholic liquor as sin. It is our duty to oppose this restriction of Christian liberty while it is in our power, not only by word, but by act, and for this reason to continue to use fermented wine in the Lord's Supper. d) The giving of offense involved in the above three points is an additional reason for refusing the use of grape-juice.

In the foregoing we have touched upon the conditions under which indifferent things acquire a moral character. Briefly, this is the case when the use or non-use of otherwise indifferent things becomes a duty in order that the true doctrine may be confessed. But refraining from the use of our Christian liberty may be demanded also in the interest of brotherliness and Christian love. We may be perfectly at ease in the enjoyment of our liberty since we know that the kingdom of God is not meat and drink. A very devout and conscientious Christian may therefore use (moderately, of course) wine and other alcoholic beverages, visit the motion-picture theater, use tobacco in its various forms, play cards, play baseball on Sunday afternoon, etc. Yet there are Christians whose conscience is troubled with scruples regarding such matters, and in deference to such weak brethren it may become our duty to refrain from the use of our freedom. The law of love demands that we do not *offend* our brother. Let us make clear what we mean by offenses. Offenses may be threefold:—

- 1) When we cause others to do what their conscience condemns. Here the words of Paul apply that we shall not destroy by our meat and drink a brother for whom Christ laid down His life. This rule applies not only to the fellowship of faith, but to all Christians. We should not by our urging, by ridicule, etc., cause a conscientious abstainer to drink beer or wine or a Catholic to eat meat on Fridays. Any one who sins against his conscience transgresses the First Commandment. He does what he believes to be displeasing to God; he does not fear God as the First Commandment prescribes.

- 2) We are to do nothing that will cause either fellow-Christians or unbelievers to get the impression that we are not sincere in our

Christianity. We must figure with their prejudice and ignorance. When our Ontario District met at Pembroke in 1928, the *pastor loci* requested all delegates to refrain from smoking either on the way to church or during intermissions, out of consideration for the Presbyterian neighborhood. Without a word of remonstrance the delegates, during the entire week of the convention, religiously refrained from offending these Christians who regarded the use of tobacco as sin. Again, in the New Testament we are taught that the Sabbath law is no longer binding upon our conscience. Yet the use of this liberty may at times give serious offense to the unchurched. Here the words of Rom. 14, 16, 18 apply.

3) By employing our rightful liberty, we may offend against sentiment or popular prejudices. In the days of the early Church there were still Jewish Christians who had an aversion to the eating of meat from animals that had been slaughtered as part of the ritual in heathen temples. Others had a similar aversion to the blood of animals and to the meat of animals that had been strangled. To spare the feelings of these people, the gathering of the disciples in Jerusalem requested the Gentile Christians to refrain from such food. Again, it was a violation of Jewish sentiment if any uncircumcised male entered the synagogue. Paul accommodated himself to this prejudice by circumcising Timothy (who was the son of a Greek father) before he traveled with him through Asia Minor. (Note the consistence of Paul in *refusing* to have Titus, a non-Jew, circumcised because *under the conditions* this would have been admitting that the Jewish law had to be observed by Christians, Gal. 2, 3—5.)

VII. The Wrong Use of Rightful Things.

At a meeting of the Joint Vestries of Greater Detroit in May, 1934, the question was discussed: Shall we tolerate the sale of beer at picnics and other social affairs of our congregations? The attitude taken by the meeting was that there should be no such sale of intoxicants. It was admitted that there is nothing intrinsically wrong in the manufacture, sale, and consumption of such beverages. On the basis of 1 Tim. 4, 4 "every creature of God is good and nothing to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer," and Acts 10, 15: "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common," it was asserted that the sinful abuse connected with alcoholic beverages does not make them sinful *per se*. Also the sale of beer at church picnics and other social affairs is not intrinsically wrong. However, it was pointed out that in this matter of selling beer there are other things besides the mere letter of the law which we ought to take into consideration. "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient." In matters which were lawful, matters in which he had the privilege of choosing freely, St. Paul nevertheless gave due attention to the expediency of the thing; he asked himself: What will be the effect? Is the thing expedient, good, wise, edifying, beneficial, or is it perhaps detrimental to my fellow-Christians and to the cause of the Lord's kingdom? If the matter was expedient, then the apostle did not hesitate to do it; but if it was not expedient, then he refrained and abstained from it and advised others to refrain and abstain from it also. The very fact that congregations will appoint a committee to prevent drunkenness at picnics proves that the situation is fraught with danger. Always there will be such among our Christians as

have a weakness for drink. Should the church be a contributory cause to drunkenness? Furthermore, the sale of beer at picnics involves the good name and reputation of the church. "The world has its eyes fixed on the Christian Church, specifically and especially on the Lutheran Church. It observes and notes what Christians do, especially what churches and church societies do. And as it sees, so it judges. If we introduce the sale of beer, drunkenness is bound to occur even with the very best of management. Our picnics and socials are semipublic affairs. The stranger may come, and when he comes, he may already be 'loaded.' An additional glass or bottle may be just enough to topple him over or just enough to start him off on a rampage of belligerence and rowdiness, and the report that will go out, a report affecting the good name of the church, will be an evil one. Let us not do it!" (Rev. H. A. Quitmeyer.)

On card-playing the *Sunday-school Times* of July 23, 1910, said: "The waste of time is serious enough as an incidental argument against card-playing; but it need not be much considered in coming to a decision on one's own practises. There is something deeper. The game of 'Authors' and other like games furnish no such combination of unhealthy, fascinating appeal to chance, and the vicious associations of card-playing, which, as shown experimentally, lends itself to the purposes and preferences of the gambler with such perfect fitness and to the absorbing desire of many for the exciting uncertainties of a guessing contest. If any game is unhealthy and feverish and long branded with the working approval of a vicious class in the community as a tool exactly suited to their bad purposes, why should thoughtful parents run the risks of such a game themselves or pass it on to their children by giving it the sanction of the home standards? And what better preparation for easy notions on any questionable practise could a father give his boy than to join with him in it?"

What, then, shall be our own attitude towards card-playing?

Card-playing is not forbidden in the Scriptures. Essentially it makes no difference whether these cards bear upon their face the pictures of certain authors, some number, or other symbol, or the familiar emblems of the common playing-card. Time was when our people looked upon these cards with loathing, with something of dread. This was the time when they were associated either with gambling or with social groups openly opposed to the church, the beer societies, turners, and the godless world generally. Other card games have, however, come into vogue that are associated neither with one nor the other, and card games as played to-day must be classified among the things indifferent. But this does not mean that Christians should freely indulge in the passion for the card table. They should not be part of the groups which spend many hours of precious time in perfecting their skill in a form of entertainment which is absolutely useless at best and which in its modern form gives play to a gambling passion as did the older type of card game, which ruined the fortunes of so many. A question related to the above is the propriety of having card games in church. Since there is still a use of cards which is not sinful, we cannot absolutely prohibit the use of playing cards for entertainment in church parlors. That playing for money or prizes of value has no place in the church, even if the proceeds go to the treasury, will be admitted by all. However, a congregation must remember that bridge parties, with

their atmosphere of passionate eagerness for winning, are also for this reason offensive to many who are ready to admit that in itself card-playing is one of the indifferent things. Let us keep them out of our churches.

Any occupation, entertainment, amusement, or diversion that causes us to give a disproportionate amount of time to their enjoyment or that absorbs our interest to such an extent that the weightier matters of life are neglected, no longer should be considered morally indifferent. Even playing golf may become sinful; the interest of boys in basket-ball must not be the outstanding feature of the young men's societies; absorption in the motion-picture theater would be sinful even if no immoral plays are seen; anything immoderate, extreme, excessive, is contrary to the spiritual principle that should govern the Christian life. Excessive indulgences in food, utter absorption in the care of the body, even devotion to scientific study or art, has so controlled the lives of those once dedicated to Christ and His kingdom that their Christianity has remained but an empty shell. A saying of the sainted Dr. Zorn occurs to me at this time: "There are many who will be lost because of eating and drinking; I do not say, because of voracious eating and excessive drinking (*Fressen und Saufen*), but on account of eating and drinking." It is a test of your Christian understanding whether you get the point of Dr. Zorn's words. They point the lesson that things that are harmless, even good, yes, according to Rom. 14 may be done to the glory of God, will no longer be indifferent, but become definitely sinful when they take the place of spiritual things and crowd religion out of the heart of professed Christians.

What is sound recreation? This question we may answer by finding the answer to another: What does it contribute to my life? Does it build up body and mind? Does it injure others that we may have pleasure? Does it brutalize passion or sublimate it? What is its effect with reference to the use of time? the use of money? the building of home-life? the aid towards self-control? the sublimation of sex ideals? the regard for the world's opinion of church people?

Some of our people have a blind spot when confronted with such practical questions as personal freedom in the use of the gifts of nature, the satisfaction of their appetites, their indulgence in hobbies, their subserviency to acquired habits. We have stated in another section that the use of tobacco in its various forms has nothing about it that is inherently wrong. Nevertheless it would not harm our Christians to pause and ask themselves whether there are not some limitations which they should observe in the use of this "weed." It is not absurd for a pastor to ask himself whether he has a right to enter a sick-room with the smell of stale tobacco in his breath, in his clothes, and on his hands. It is not absurd for a Christian to ask himself whether he is not abusing a liberty when his tobacco habits make it necessary for people to wash their hands after having shaken hands with him. Nor is it absurd for any Christian young man to wonder whether spending dime after dime for tobacco can be done with a clear conscience; or for a theological student to consider refraining from the use of the pipe because the doctor has warned him against 'tobacco heart'; or for a Christian husband to conclude that he is practising cruelty when he offends his wife's nerves by saturating himself with the taste and the odor of nicotine.

For a person to be puffing incessantly at a pipe, cigaret, or cigar is unnatural. Some men have one or the other in their mouths nearly all the time when awake, except while eating their meals.

There are two extremes to shun in taking a position on the tobacco question. And both should be avoided by the Christian.

VIII. No Longer on the Borderland, but Inherently Sinful.

Things indifferent may become sinful by circumstances unavoidably connected with them. The old-time *saloon*, viewed simply as a place for the sale of alcoholic beverages, was essentially an *adiaphoron*. Neither the manufacture nor the sale nor the drinking of wine or beer is in itself sinful. However, through the evils that were unavoidably connected with the conduct of the saloon the institution became an infamous one, and very rightly our congregations refused membership to saloon-keepers. The saloon was compelled either by high taxation or competition to promote the excessive use of liquor, drunkenness. It was a place of vile conversations. It was to a large extent a breeder of crime. Even the so-called decent saloon, which would not permit drunkenness on the premises or unseemly conduct, was guilty of sending thousands to an early grave through fostering the indulgence in strong drink. Similarly the average tavern of our day is an enemy of public morality. It no longer depends upon the senseless and vicious habit of "treating," but it has become a plague spot in the life of our American youth, even where the abomination of the modern dance is not connected with it. The development of this institution is fast going in the direction where we again shall have to say that no Christian can conduct such a place.

A weak Christian, as we have seen, is a Christian who has not been adequately instructed on some question of faith or morals and who may yet be regarded as a member of Christ's invisible Church so long as he professes the great fundamentals of saving doctrine and Christian conduct. This is a principle of very large application and is recognized in our acknowledgment that there are true believers also in erring churches. Yet this consideration must be carefully distinguished from the subject of *adiaphora*. If a Christian is not sufficiently enlightened in matters of faith and life, it does not follow that the questions involved are indifferent and that we may agree to disagree. (Unionism.) Apply this to the *lodge*. It is true that there are Christians in the secret orders who are not aware of the sinfulness of the lodge. They are not conscious, at least not inwardly convinced, of the wrong of lodge connection. And before we exclude members from our communion because they belong to the lodge, we must first endeavor to instruct them, no matter how firmly we may be convinced that they went in with open eyes. An effort must be made to bring them to a realization of the sinfulness of their worshipping jointly with men who reject Jesus Christ and despise the means of grace; to bring them to see that the lodge, which pronounces all those blessed who die as "good lodgemen," teaches a way of salvation which ends in hell, since no man has ever been saved by good character. But when a congregation has convinced itself that in the case of the particular lodge under consideration such is indeed the doctrine and practise of the order and that membership in it is an inconsistency for a Christian, is a sin and a denial of

Christ, it will know what course to take with one who stubbornly maintains his right to stand on a platform which tries to unite what cannot be united — the worship of the lodge idol and worship of the true God, salvation by grace alone and salvation by conduct. In saying this, we do not at all require of those with whom we are dealing an especial degree of Christian knowledge. The very fundamentals of Christianity are involved. If Christianity demands of its adherents that they worship the true God alone and that they profess no religion which denies, by direct implication, that Jesus is the only Savior and that man cannot save himself by good conduct, then it must demand that those who regard themselves as followers of Jesus Christ separate themselves from those who hold contrary religious views. The simple fact that in the lodge men of all religions worship together is sufficient to establish its non-Christian character. To participate in religious ceremonies with those who either do not worship the true God at all (idolatry) or worship Him in a manner He has forbidden (unionism) and to expect salvation as the reward of a virtuous life, these things do not agree with elementary Christianity. As stated, there are Christians in the lodge who have never become aware of this inconsistency. But the Church can never accept this weakness of the uninstructed as a norm for its own practise. We have seen that even in the case of adiaphora this would be a course detrimental to a sound Christian church-life.

There are many sins against which we must warn. Let us not make more sins than there are. Above all, let us not leave the conscience in doubt unless it is a matter in which we are ready to excommunicate those who act according to a conviction which we possibly cannot share. Either institute proceedings of church discipline or leave the matter alone. And I would certainly not say "Thou shalt not" unless I can quote Scripture. But in the case of the lodge every text which teaches salvation by grace and every prohibition of idolatry speaks out in clarion tones against lodge-worship and -doctrine. Most emphatically we do not list lodge-membership as an adiaphoron, on which we may agree to disagree.

Do we consider *dancing* a sin, or is it one of the indifferent things? Or shall we differentiate and make a distinction between the dance in the home and the dance in the public dance-halls? It is evident that many parents do not see the dangers of the dance. They even attend themselves. Young people say in all seriousness, "I don't see any sin in dancing. Of course, I know there are many who make sin out of it, but they would be bad anyway, whether they were at a dance or not; and as for me, I'm decent, and I can't see any harm in it; I dance for the joy of keeping step to the music." Especially, they say, they can see no harm in a house dance, where the company is picked. Many influential members of our congregations are indifferent; they cannot see any positive good in dancing, but neither can they see any harm in it. They permit their boys and girls to dance, and as an appendix to their permission they say, half in jest: "We have all been young once." Some church-members "open their homes to the young people of the neighborhood" and feel they are thereby doing charity work. Dr. Wm. A. McKeever, head of Child Welfare in the University of Kansas, refers to the close-grip dance as the chief cause of the "sex intoxication" of the American young people, but says that "this snaky thing" is so new that "the majority of the so-called best parents are yet unaroused as to its sinister mean-

ings for the growing generation and for the future of society." There is dancing and dancing, we are told. A comparison is drawn between dancing and kissing, the latter of which we do not condemn in every case, though some of it is objectionable. We distinguish between the kiss of sympathy, of respectful regard and affection,— and the passionate kiss, which is an expression of the mating impulse and permitted only between the married or those engaged to be married. Hence, while it is often a sin against the Sixth Commandment, no one in his right senses would so judge of all kissing. Why can we not distinguish, then, between dancing which is decent and proper and dancing which is immodest, improper, immoral? "Let us not condemn dancing wholesale and place a reproach on our young people which they do not deserve. Does it not indicate an impure mind if we charge them with motives of a sexual nature when we perceive the hold which the dance craze has taken upon them?" Let us investigate.

To begin with, while it is to be acknowledged that impurity of desire may be expressed more or less boldly and indecently during the dance, the modern dance is essentially the same wherever you go. Its origin is in the tango. Remember that all our fathers knew was the waltz, to which the hard judgments apply expressed by Dr. Walther and others. The waltz is decency itself compared with the modern forms of the dance. These originated in the South American houses of prostitution and thence were translated to San Francisco, where they "spread like the pest" through all social classes. This was the view expressed by Bird S. Coler, former Controller of New York. Mr. Coler characterized the modern dancing craze as intolerable and "inconsistent with Christian morality." The *Milwaukee Sentinel*, when the new steps came into vogue, quoted Prof. W. F. Brown, president of the United Professional Teachers and Dancers of America, as unreservedly condemning the modern development of the dance, from the point of morality as well as from esthetics and hygiene. Mr. Brown said that "the most vulgar and abandoned of the poses and steps common to the lowest dance-halls are the ordinary diversion of young men and girls in the best classes of American society." He continued: "The slum dances of the large cities have been deliberately imported into the best circles of society by college students who had learned them in the course of adventures they would be ashamed to confess afterward."

The notion that so much depends upon the place should be discarded. The simple fact is that the "licensed, commercialized dance has been found, on the whole, to be much better conducted than the average private dance." (*The Kit*, Pocket Quarterly of Social Recreation, March, 1928.) The parlor dance is not an antidote against, it is a feeder for, the public dance. For one thing, the positions are the same, and the music is the same. On account of its demoralizing effect on character, Hitler within the first week of his power abolished jazz; yet this same music is heard almost incessantly in many Christian homes. A Y. M. C. A. worker goes so far as to say: "I think the whole sex problem of the social dance is increased tremendously by the music which accompanies it. In fact, I don't know but that it is almost entirely responsible for the indecencies and vulgar contortions now displayed on the dance-floor." (*The Kit*, p. 63.) For this reason, too, the attempts of churches to supervise the dance have ended in failure. They have found it uncontrollable.

This is what pastors report who have tried it: "In my experience I have never seen a place where they introduced the so-called 'decent, chaperoned dance' that in six months or less it was not of the same type, or nearly so, as the average public dance-hall. It is uncontrollable." (*The Kit*, p. 50.) "Young people who desire to get the kick out of the dance will not support the tame church dances, but go elsewhere. On the other hand, those encouraged to dance by the church will at some time frequent the public dance-halls." (*The Kit*, p. 56.)

The nature of the modern dances "makes it necessary for the man to hold his partner firmly and, in order to follow well, for the girl to make her body relaxed and supple within the arm of her partner." (*The Kit*, p. 18.) Dr. McKeever points out the close embrace, bringing into contact the pelvic parts, thus stimulating the generative organs and "rendering the chemical processes abnormal." And remember that this educator is speaking of the new social dance in the only form in which our young people know it.

The real secret of the popularity of the dance lies in the position which the dancers take, persons of opposite sex embracing each other. That is the objectionable feature of the dance. "In close contact and to the tune of soul-intoxicating music the giddy whirl goes on into the wee hours of the morning. Now, if the close contact, this warm embrace, this cheek-to-cheek dancing does not kindle the fires of evil lust and passion, what will? The real pleasure of the dance consists in the excitement of sexual passion." So says the *Lutheran Annual* of 1927. We might add that the very position of the dancer is indecent, no matter what his thoughts are. For a strange man and woman to have their arm around each other, bodies touching, is more than a game. Even if you could do it without evil thoughts, most likely your partner could not. If both could do it without evil thoughts, the action would be indecent still.

Many young people who do not see the wrong in the dance have never analyzed the pleasure it gives them. Jesus says: "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart," Matt. 5, 28. That is the touchstone. Can that be called chaste and decent behavior when a young girl in the course of an evening comes so near, heart to heart, with one man after another? Let fathers and mothers and young people only stop to think, and they will answer, It is not. There are of course those who will not accept this proof against dancing, but try to laugh it down. They do not want to forego the sensual pleasure the dance affords; but thoughtful Christians will readily admit that this thing, which has not only the appearance of evil, but cannot but be vicious in itself, must be shunned by all who would be disciples of Him who was Purity itself. "Flee youthful lusts," this word of the apostle is fully applicable to the dance. Rev. John Roach Straton (Baptist), in his address *The Dance of Death*, asked whether "a man can put his arm around a radiant woman and draw her body to his own, with her cheek against his cheek and her breasts pressed to his bosom, and her limbs intertwined with his, and the aroma of her hair in his nostrils, and the sparkle of her eye close to his own, whether a man can take such a position as that and then go swinging across the dance-room floor in rhythmic motion and still say that he has no improper thoughts and that his God-given procreative powers are not unduly excited?"

A registered nurse is quoted by Miss Clara J. Jones, a Rescue Home worker, in the *Lutheran Herald*, 1934 (p. 236), as follows on the reflexes that are created in glands and nerves by the modern dance: "When a boy or girl enters the adolescent period they not only unfold physically, mentally, and spiritually, but they also become attracted to one another. That in itself is absolutely natural and God-given. We learn that it is a result of an internal secretion sent out by certain glands and picked up by the blood stream. We think of the saliva that flows when we are hungry when the odor of food reaches us. Soon we must swallow. However, this secretion can more easily be compared to that of the thyroid gland as the secretion is picked up by the blood stream. Allow me to quote one of our doctors: 'There are no scientific data available based on actual research work to substantiate this statement, but it stands to reason that contact as it is established while dancing by male and female facing each other in close approximation of the embrace, the necking, the wiggling of the hips, the interposing of lower limbs so frequently seen on the dance-floor, must for biological and physiological reasons stimulate the glandular secretions that control the sex urges.' Surely these glands do not know the difference whether you are dancing in a barn or in your parlor and become stimulated just the same. The doctor tells us also that we have what is called the erogeneous zones, and when they are touched or contacted by the opposite sex, they will set up the sex thought. The eye and ear also are affected, hence a suggestion or story will bring about the same reaction. 'However, dancing is the most dangerous thing in stimulating these zones,' he concluded. Bigelow states the following as the result of dancing: 'Sex stimulation may be consciously recognized by normal men, but probably is not identified as other than general excitement by most women.'"

Sometimes this creative instinct or sex hunger which comes with adolescence is termed a sleeping giant in our system. However, if we begin to play with it and tease it, especially if we do so in the dark, it springs at us sometimes quite unawares. This is the real danger of petting and dancing. We pray, "Lead us not into temptation," and surely it would not be right to run directly into the jaws of this temptation by teasing this greatest of all instincts.

Granted that, as modern psychology maintains, a girl is probably aroused only 10 per cent. by the same stimulus that arouses a man 80 per cent., yet the hold which the dance has acquired over American youth is accounted for by experts as a result of the appeal to sex. All modern psychologists are agreed that dancing is an expression of the sex instinct in its lowest animal forms. We may admit that the average young woman is unconscious of the arousal of any sexual emotion by the social dance. Some girls enjoy dancing primarily for the rhythmic expression it provides and will dance with another girl with as much enjoyment as with a man. ("Stag dances" are not so popular. The men know what they want and do not get it when dancing with each other.) Speaking of the same thing, Dr. Gray says: "I want to put down, for the sake of the girls, a fact of which they are often ignorant. When you allow men to embrace and kiss you, even when you allow them lesser familiarities, you may go on your way thinking no more about it and undisturbed. The whole thing may not really have stirred you. But with men it is not so. Often by such things tumults are raised in them whereby the way

of self-control and chastity is made cruelly difficult." (*The Kit*, p. 21.)

As long as fourteen years ago (*Lutheran Witness*, 1920, No. 18) we held that the difference between the waltz and the modern steps is this: The waltz was objectionable chiefly as a source of temptation; the modern dance is no longer temptation to sin, "it is itself essentially indulgence in fleshly lust, and those who participate are guilty of an immoral practise." The best modern scientific opinion confirms this judgment. The British authority Havelock Ellis says: "Among civilized nations the dance does not only rouse sexual desire, but is often a substitute for the enjoyment of love because it conveys something of the pleasure of satisfied desire. You may notice this often among young girls, who expend a great deal of energy in dancing, but do not tire out, but rather attain a feeling of happiness and quiet. It is significant that after the beginning of sexual relations, girls often lose their desire for the dance." (Quoted by L. Loewenfeld, *Sexuelle Konstitution*, S. 42, Anm. 3.) Modern texts in psychology no longer list the dance as an incentive, but as part, of the sexual commerce itself. There is a deep truth therefore in the remark of a pastor quoted by our Argentine paper. When this pastor had told a young man that dancing was an expression of the desire for a woman, the young man became very angry and denied it. The pastor replied quietly, "You are right. You no longer desire her; you have her in your arms."

Prof. W. C. Wilkinson of the University of Chicago offers this analysis: "My accusation is that the dance, instead of affording an opportunity for mutually ennobling companionship between man and woman, inspired with a chaste and sweet interfused remembrance of their contrasted relationship to each other, — that the dance instead of this consists substantially of a system of means contrived with more than human ingenuity to excite the instinct of sex to action, however subtle and disguised at the moment, in its sequel the most bestial and degrading. I charge that here, and not elsewhere, in the anatomy of that elusive fascination, which belongs so peculiarly to the dance the scalpel is laid upon the quivering secret of life." "Passion, passion transformed if you please never so much, subsisting in no matter how many finely contrasted degrees of sensuality — passion, and nothing else, is the true basis of the popularity of the dance." Mr. Holt, in his tract *Is Dancing a Sin?* reprints these words from the lips of a woman dancer, quoted by Rev. Elderdice: "The dance became to me, and whomsoever danced with me, one lingering sweet and purely sensual pleasure, where heart beat against heart and eyes looked burning words which lips dared not speak. If my partner failed to arouse in me these passions, I did not dance with him the second time." Ex-dancing Master Prof. A. T. Sullivan says: "Waltzing is the spur of lust." T. A. Faulkner, former proprietor of the Los Angeles Dancing Academy, says: "It is a startling fact, but a fact nevertheless, that two-thirds of the girls who enter dancing-schools are ruined before the year is out. And three-fourths of the outcasts had a man's arm about them for the first time at a social dance. Of 200 brothel inmates whom I talked with personally, 163 regarded the dancing-school and the ballroom as the direct cause of their downfall." A New York writer, who is a man about town and no prude, has this to say about the average dance establishment of

that city: "Seventy per cent. of the fallen girls at Manhattan were tripped up by jazz."

Not because the type of dancing is any worse, but because of the combination of liquor before the dance and automobile after the dance, the new dancing pavilions and the "dancing-academies" of our larger cities record the heaviest toll of ruined characters, of broken lives. "The dance-hall is one of the principal pitfalls into which the young girl of Chicago stumbles to her moral ruin," Mrs. Alice Phillips Aldrich, superintendent of welfare of the Illinois Vigilance Association, declares in one of her recent reports. They constitute one of the main external answers to the ever prevalent and time-worn questions of "Why do girls go wrong?" One of our pastors writes: "My people are surrounded by a dance-crazy public and by three dance-pavilions, the best of which has been termed by a local physician (whom I would hardly call a Christian) 'a hell-hole.' This particular one is only a mile from our church. Most of my young people have danced and many of them have attended one or all of these pavilion dances. It would seem therefore that clear-cut, honest, sincere, sharp denunciation of that which is evil in the dance will have blessed results, though perhaps not in all cases. Our young people are not a bad lot, as some like to make them out, but the majority of them are willing to abide by God's Word and to work in His interest *if they are but shown the way and led.*" Let us hope that this is true; that the majority of our young people are still willing "to be shown the way and to be led." May pastors and parents become alive to this duty. Most of all, the mothers should recognize a solemn obligation in this respect. No person values the chastity of young men and especially of daughters more than a mother. That mothers should be so blunted in their conscience as to permit dancing in their families is incomprehensible.

We close this part of our discussion with the appeal of Rev. W. M. Czamanske: "Who is responsible for the rottenness of the dance to-day? The mothers. The girls of to-day would not be thronging public dance-halls and ballrooms in questionable costumes with hardly more on their bodies than Salome wore, were they not permitted and instructed by their mothers. The dance-halls would have to go out of business if the mothers kept their daughters home; for men will not dance alone. But mothers seem to be afraid that their daughters will find no husbands or that they will be out of fashion. In order to avoid that calamity, they sacrifice their daughters to the Moloch of the dance."

No, the modern dance is not an adiaphoron.

